

## Peer review—the “who” and the “how”

In an earlier editorial, we gave recognition to 227 persons who reviewed manuscripts for *Tobacco Control* from late 1993 to the end of 1995.<sup>1</sup> Appended to this editorial is another list of 227 individuals—those who reviewed papers for the journal as outside referees or co-editors in 1996 and 1997. This list includes those who reviewed papers for two special supplements to the journal which were published in 1997.<sup>2–3</sup> As usual, we express our appreciation to them all, as the quality of the journal depends on the vital service they perform.

In a 1993 editorial I explained how we performed peer review at that time.<sup>4</sup> We have used a rigorous peer-review process since the inception of the journal, but that process has been refined and strengthened in recent years. So I'll take this opportunity to explain how we now conduct peer review at *Tobacco Control*.

The most significant change is the use of an editorial committee which makes *consensus* decisions on papers submitted to the journal. The committee, modelled after a similar committee used by the *BMJ*, is often referred to internally as the “hanging committee”. That name did *not* originate from the macabre meaning of the word “hang”; rather, it is borrowed from the Royal Academy of Arts in London, which has used a “hanging committee” to decide which paintings to hang on its walls (personal communication from Dr Richard Smith, editor of *BMJ*).

Before 1997, I myself made interim and final decisions on papers—whether to accept or reject them, or to send them back to authors for revisions. Those decisions were aided by comments from peer reviewers and recommendations made by senior and associate editors. Beginning with papers submitted in January 1997, editorial decisions have been made by our three-member hanging committee, consisting of myself and our two senior editors—Drs Ross Brownson and K Michael Cummings. Dr Brownson is professor and chair of the Department of Community Medicine at Saint Louis University's School of Public Health. Dr Cummings is chair of the Department of Cancer Control and Epidemiology at Roswell Park Cancer Institute in Buffalo, New York. The hanging committee meets weekly by conference call.

When papers arrive at our editorial office, they are assigned to Dr Brownson or Dr Cummings on an alternating basis, so that one of them takes the lead on each paper. At the next conference call, the lead senior editor makes a recommendation to the committee as to whether a new paper should be rejected outright or sent for external peer review. If the paper is designated for peer review, the committee identifies referees to whom the paper will be sent. Generally we send papers to three peer reviewers, so that if one reviewer is unable or unwilling to review it, we are left with two others who can. If a paper has substantive data analysis, it is also sent to one of our three consulting editors for methods and statistics: Dr Seth Emont, a senior programme officer at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation; Dr Todd Rogers, who until recently was a senior research scientist (for more than a decade) at Stanford University's Center for Research in Disease Prevention; and Dr Michael Siegel, an assistant professor at Boston University's School of Public Health.

*Tobacco Control* has 12 associate editors, each of whom covers a distinct area in tobacco control for the journal. The associate editors, and the areas they handle, are shown

on the inside front cover of the journal. If the subject matter addressed by a paper falls within the purview of an associate editor, we will often request assistance from that individual. In that circumstance, the associate editor will typically nominate peer reviewers for the paper, and will make recommendations to the hanging committee concerning the disposition of the paper (accept, reject, revise) as it goes through the various stages of editorial and peer review. In some cases the associate editor carries on correspondence with the author.

When peer review is completed on a paper, or when a revised paper is received from an author, it is placed on the agenda of the next conference call. Relevant materials for each manuscript on the agenda are distributed in advance to each of the three members of the committee. During the call, the senior editor who has the lead on a particular paper summarises the content of the manuscript; the feedback from those who reviewed the paper (outside referees, the consulting editor for methods and statistics, and the associate editor); and in the case of a revised paper, the changes made to the earlier version. After discussion, the committee reaches a consensus decision, representing interim or final action on the paper. With very few exceptions, decisions of the hanging committee are unanimous.

When we request that authors revise their paper, we provide them with “blinded” copies of peer review comments to guide them in their revisions. When we reject manuscripts, we also send authors the comments from peer reviewers, to help the authors improve their papers should they wish to resubmit them to another journal.

In addition, we usually share all the peer review comments (with identifiers removed) and our letters to authors with each of the reviewers. This gives them feedback on editorial decisions regarding the paper and allows them to compare their own judgments on the manuscript with those of their peers.

The hanging committee approach yields several benefits. First, three editors make joint decisions based on careful review and discussion; thus, decisions are more likely to be well-informed, fair to the authors, and free from any bias that one particular editor might bring to the table. Second, the approach distributes the workload among three individuals, which allows papers to be handled more efficiently. Third, a weekly meeting agenda ensures that the process moves forward continuously. In a future editorial, we will report trend data on how quickly decisions are made on manuscripts, how long it takes for accepted papers to be published, the number of papers submitted, and the percentage that are accepted for publication.

As we have noted previously,<sup>1</sup> the peer review process is far from perfect, but it is the best form of quality control we have in “journalology”. We will continue to strive to improve the process, and we welcome comments on how to do so from our readers and contributors.

RONALD M DAVIS

Editor

1 Davis RM, Chapman S. Peer reviewers—November 1993 to December 1995. *Tobacco Control* 1996;5:4–6.

2 AHCPR Smoking cessation guideline: its goals and impact. *Tobacco Control* 1997;6(suppl 1):S1–99.

3 Studies in community tobacco control: projects COMMIT and ASSIST. *Tobacco Control* 1997;6(suppl 2):S1–70.

4 Davis RM. Two years of *Tobacco Control*: how are we doing? *Tobacco Control* 1993;2:265–6.

## Peer reviewers—1996 and 1997

Jasjit S Ahluwalia  
David G Altman  
Amanda Amos  
Charles Atkin  
Ann Baker  
Dileep G Bal  
John Baron  
Karl E Bauman  
John Beasley  
Diane M Becker  
Ramez N Bedwani  
Michael E Begay  
Neal L Benowitz  
James Bergman  
Lisa A Bero  
Alan J Best  
Lois Biener  
Michele Bloch  
John Bloom  
Richard J Bonnie  
Ron Borland  
Deborah J Bowen  
Rick Boyd  
Ross C Brownson  
Germaine Buck  
David M Burns  
Dee Burton  
Tom Carroll  
Frank J Chaloupka  
Simon Chapman  
Anne Charlton  
T L Chen  
Pam Clark  
Valerie A Clarke  
Richard Clayton  
Joel Cohen  
Stuart Cohen  
Graham Colditz  
Gregory N Connolly  
Terry L Conway  
Thomas M Cooper  
K Michael Cummings  
Vera Luiza da Costa e Silva  
James R Davis  
Joseph R DiFranza  
Mirjana V Djordjevic  
Douglas W Dockery  
Rob Donovan  
Russ Eggert  
John Elder  
Sherry Emery  
Karen Emmons  
Seth L Emont  
Virginia L Ernster  
Daniel H Ershoff  
Luis G Escobedo  
Ruth A Etzel  
Karl O Fagerström  
Arthur Farkas  
Roberta G Ferrence  
Linda Ferry  
Michael C Fiore  
Paul M Fischer  
Edwin B Fisher, Jr  
Brian R Flay  
Roberto Forero  
Jean L Forster

Stephen Fortmann  
Godfrey Fowler  
Deborah A Galuska  
John Garcia  
Karen K Gerlach  
Elizabeth Gilpin  
Gary A Giovino  
Stanton A Glantz  
Russell E Glasgow  
Thomas J Glynn  
Marvin E Goldberg  
Adam Goldstein  
Michael Goldstein  
Steven Gourlay  
Nigel Gray  
David Gregorio  
Verner Grise  
Ellen R Gritz  
Janet Gross  
Neil E Grunberg  
Tyler D Hartwell  
Gerard B Hastings  
Anthony J Hedley  
Jack E Henningfield  
David Hill  
Tom Hodgson  
C D'Arcy Holman  
Thomas P Houston  
Philip P Huang  
John R Hughes  
Robert Hughes  
Corinne G Husten  
Andrew Hyland  
Norm Hymowitz  
Les Irwig  
Peyton Jacob  
Peter Jacobson  
Carlos Roberto Jaén  
Martin J Jarvis  
Leonard A Jason  
Christopher Jenkins  
Murray J Kaiserman  
Nancy Kaufman  
Theodore E Keeler  
Juliette S Kendrick  
Joel Killen  
Alan King  
Robert C Klesges  
Howard K Koh  
Thomas E Kottke  
Lynn T Kozlowski  
T H Lam  
Tim Lancaster  
Harry A Lando  
Scott J Leischow  
Edward Lichtenstein  
Daniel Longo  
Alan D Lopez  
Jay H Lubin  
Douglas A Luke  
Karl E Lund  
William R Lynn  
Lynn MacFayden  
Judith L Mackay  
Marc W Manley  
Marian Marbury  
Alfred C Marcus

Tim McAfee  
Ian McAllister  
Bruce McCarthy  
Ann McNeill  
Robin Mermelstein  
Dawn Misra  
Karen Monaco  
Robert Morris  
David Nelson  
Paul Nordgren  
Thomas E Novotny  
Don Nutbeam  
Judith K Ockene  
Patrick O'Malley  
C Tracy Orleans  
Merete Osler  
Deborah J Ossip-Klein  
Bart D Ostro  
Neville Owen  
Michael D Parkinson  
John L Pauly  
Neal Pearce  
Linda L Pederson  
Cheryl L Perry  
Diana B Petitti  
John M Pinney  
Phyllis Pirie  
Richard W Pollay  
David Pollock  
Paul Pomrehn  
James O Prochaska  
Alexander Prokhorov  
Cynthia Rand  
Donald J Reid  
Patrick L Remington  
Stephen Rennard  
James L Repace  
Dorothy P Rice  
Robyn Richmond  
Michael Robbins  
Robert G Robinson  
Todd Rogers  
Lynn Rosenberg  
Jonathan M Samet  
Rob Sanson-Fisher  
Margot Schofield  
Joel Schwartz  
Randy Schwartz  
Russell Sciandra  
Michelle Scollo  
Herbert H Severson  
Donald J Sharp  
Saul Shiffman  
Robert Shipley  
Donald R Shopland  
Michael Siegel  
Chris Silagy  
Karyn Skaar  
John Slade  
Karen Slama  
Leif Solberg  
Laura J Solomon  
Eduardo J Somoies  
Glorian Sorensen  
Kyle Steenland  
Frances Stillman  
Maxine L Stitzer

Jeffrey J Stoddard  
Steven Y Sussman  
David Sweanor  
Martin Taylor  
Beti Thompson  
Michael J Thun  
Per Tillgren  
Scott L Tomar  
Fernand Turcotte

D G Uitenbrock  
Sverre Vedal  
Wayne F Velicer  
Melanie Wakefield  
Michael Wall  
Larry Wallack  
Kenneth E Warner  
Thomas K Welty  
David W Wetter

Gary Whitlock  
Marianne B Wildey  
Stephen Woodward  
John K Worden  
Anna H Wu  
Derek Yach  
James P Zacny  
Shu-Hong Zhu

## Stepping down

Having served as editor of *Tobacco Control* for the past seven years, I have decided to step down from this position. Since the journal's launch in 1992, we have made great strides with the publication, and the positive feedback we've received from readers, authors, and many others has been gratifying. One of the most enjoyable aspects of my service as editor has been the opportunity to work with a superb team of co-editors, and with friends and colleagues at the BMJ Publishing Group who define the word "professional". But it is time for me to move on to other challenges, and to let others take over the helm.

An advertisement recruiting candidates for the editorship appears below. I expect to pass the reins to the new editor early in 1999. Before then, in a future editorial, I will take the liberty of sharing with you more thoughts and reflections about the roles and accomplishments of the journal.

RONALD M DAVIS  
*Editor*

Applications are invited for the post of

## **EDITOR** ***Tobacco Control***

Specialists with an interest in research, analysis, commentary and debate on policies, programmes and strategies that are likely to further the objectives of a comprehensive tobacco control policy world wide are invited to apply for the post of Editor. Please send a letter of application, a curriculum vitae, and a short statement about the strengths and weaknesses of *Tobacco Control* and your proposed editorial policy. Full Editorial support will be provided and it is envisaged that the Editor will need to devote about 8-12 hours a week to the journal. Applications from specialists outside the UK and joint applications from two or more candidates wishing to act as co-Editors will be welcomed.

Closing date is 31st October 1998. Interviews will be held shortly thereafter to enable the successful candidate(s) to take up the post from January 1999.

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